



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## OSTER ASSUMES DUTIES AS ASSISTANT ADJUTANT FOR SD ARMY GUARD

South Dakota National Guard Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette has announced Brig. Gen. Michael Oster as the next assistant adjutant general of the South Dakota Army National Guard.

Oster, of Rapid City, is responsible to the adjutant general for strategic planning, strength management, troop readiness and mobilization support of the state's more than 3,100 Army National Guard Soldiers.



Oster is looking forward to the many opportunities that come with the position. Oster assumed responsibilities from interim assistant adjutant, Brig. Gen. Marshall Michels.

Oster began his military service in 1986, enlisting as a combat wire installer with Battery A, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery in Mitchell. He received his commission through the Officer Candidate School program in 1990. He earned his Bachelors and Master of Science degrees from South Dakota State University and is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College.

Oster has served at nearly every staff level and command position throughout his career. Oster has commanded the 665th Maintenance Company, 727th Transportation Company, Recruiting and Retention Battalion the 152nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion and the 109th Regional Support Group.

Oster has also completed two tours of duty: one to Iraq in 2004-2005 with the Rapid Fielding Initiative, and his second tour to Afghanistan with the 152nd CSSB in 2013.

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# HEALTHY AGING RESOURCE FAIR

SDDVA Field Service Officer Kevin Bowen participated in the Healthy Aging Resource Fair at the Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Aberdeen last week.

FSO Bowen visited with veterans and attendees on veterans benefits, widows pension, healthcare benefits and the new state veterans cemetery.

Health screenings and testing's were also available, as well as flu shots.

Speakers addressed: mental health and art therapy, living healthy life styles, caregiving, identity theft, and scams and using today's technology.



# WOLF TO DEMONSTRATE SCULPTING AT SFVAHCS

Veterans visiting the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System are in for quite a surprise!

Sculptor Darwin Wolf will be live-sculpting in the front entrance of the SFVAHCS Hospital until November 8.

Darwin is sculpting a female fighter pilot that will be on display at the Veterans Plaza in Peoria, Illinois.

Wolf recently sculpted the life-size statute of South Dakota Medal of Honor recipient Michael J. Fitzmaurice, which is on display at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home in Hot Springs.



# WARRIORS NEVER GIVE UP VETERANS HUNT

Warriors Never Give Up (WNGU) has a unique opportunity for veterans with limited mobility and disabled veterans who are no longer able to walk the fields during pheasant season.

WNGU has always welcomed veterans that could only post, but they don't get much shooting. With the new venue near Huron, those who need canes, wheel chairs, walkers or have heart/lung issues can stay in one place and birds are released.

Each participant can shoot up to ten birds which will be cleaned and packaged for them.

There are only 10 spots available for the November 2<sup>nd</sup> event that will begin at 11:30 a.m. and end by 4:30 p.m. with lunch included. All costs will be covered except transportation to the event.

To register for the event you can email Richard Ambrosius at: [grichard@warriorsnevergiveup.org](mailto:grichard@warriorsnevergiveup.org) or call/text 904-718-3146 and leave your name, email address and phone number.



## VABHHCS FLU SHOT SCHEDULE

Enrolled veterans may take advantage of VA Black Hills Health Care System's convenient walk in flu vaccine clinics. The flu vaccination is your best protection against the flu, which begins in the fall and can continue through late spring.

There will be Flu Vaccine Blitz Days on October 8 and October 11 at Fort Meade in Building 113, Room 178 from 6:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (MT).

At Fort Meade Primary Care there are daily walk-in flu vaccine clinics from 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. (MT).

At the Rapid City Clinic and Hot Springs Primary Care Clinic, veterans may walk in on October 7, 8, and 11 from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. (MT)

For more information about the importance of prevention during flu season please visit the VA public health information website. [Click here to learn more.](#)



# VETERANS CAN NOW ENROLL IN VA'S MILLION VETERAN PROGRAM ONLINE

Veterans can now join the [Million Veteran Program](#) online (MVP) as part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) effort to improve the lives of veterans through health care research and innovation.

More than 775,000 veteran partners have already joined MVP, a national, voluntary, research initiative that helps the VA study how genes affect the health of veterans.

"MVP has already resulted in a number of important scientific publications that increase our knowledge of conditions that affect veterans' health, and we expect this resource to continue to prove its value over the coming years," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "The VA is excited to announce the launch of MVP Online, which will make it even easier for veterans nationwide to take part in this landmark research effort."

Veterans currently enrolled in the VA care can use their existing VA credentials to securely log in to MVP Online to view their personalized dashboard and learn more about the program. To partner with MVP, veterans can use the online portal to complete the consent process, allow access to health records (for research purposes only), answer surveys about their health and lifestyle and schedule an MVP visit at a participating VA site to provide a blood sample. The VA is currently piloting ways to make the MVP sample collection more convenient for veterans who do not live near a participating VA site.

MVP helps researchers better understand how genes affect health and illness, which may help prevent illnesses and improve treatments of disease. Research using MVP data is already a part of more than 30 VA projects, including efforts focused on understanding the role of genes in PTSD, diabetes, cancer, heart disease and suicide. Significant research findings have already published in high-impact scientific journals. This research is helping the VA to better understand the role genes play in many common illnesses, especially those illnesses common among combat veterans.

MVP partners include veterans from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam. MVP also has the largest representation of minorities of any genomic cohort in the U.S.



For more information about the Million Veteran Program, visit MVP Online at <https://www.mvp.va.gov>. For Veterans not enrolled in VA care, the ability to join using MVP Online will be available in the near future. Until then, please call the MVP Info Center at 866-441-6075 to learn more about how to join.

Subscribe to receive email updates about VA research.

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Office of Research & Development



# VA TO IMPLEMENT EXECUTIVE ORDERS GOVERNING TAXPAYER-FUNDED UNION ACTIVITIES

In a victory for veterans, taxpayers and VA employees, the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia has denied an attempt by the leadership of several government unions to block implementation of parts of the following three important Executive Orders (EOs):

- [Developing efficient, effective, and cost-reducing approaches to federal sector collective bargaining.](#)
- [Ensuring transparency, accountability, and efficiency in taxpayer funded union time use.](#)
- [Promoting accountability and streamlining removal procedures consistent with merit systems principles.](#)

The VA plans to implement the EOs, which include numerous changes that will improve VA medical care, customer service and staff accountability while maximizing service to veterans and value for taxpayers, including:

- Limiting the free or discounted use of government property for union business, potentially enabling the department to repurpose hundreds of thousands of square feet of office space currently used by unions.
- Reducing the maximum amount of time VA employees can spend during the workday serving unions, redirecting man hours back to direct services and medical care. In FY 2016, VA employees spent [more than a million duty hours](#) on taxpayer-funded union time at a cost of more than \$49 million. \$49 million is the cost of roughly: 355,000 naloxone injection kits to prevent Veterans' death by opiod overdose; (1) employing more than 550 VA suicide risk management social workers for one year; (2) or, providing a year of housing to more than 2,800 homeless Veterans. (3)

"Under this administration, the VA is seeking more patients than ever before, more quickly than ever before, and studies show the VA now compares favorably to the private sector for access and quality care, and in many cases exceeds it." said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "These executive orders will help the VA continue to improve by ensuring our employees and resources are focused squarely on serving veterans."

# VA COMPLETES HOME LOAN FUNDING FEE REFUND INITIATIVE

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently completed an aggressive initiative to process home loan funding fee refunds to veteran borrowers, issuing more than \$400 million in refunds.

The refunds are the culmination of a multi-year internal review of millions of VA-backed home loans spanning almost two decades.

“VA staff worked diligently throughout the summer reviewing 130,000 cases, which is an average of 16,000 loans reviewed per week,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This effort included loans dating back nearly 20 years. Our administration prioritized fixing the problems and paid veterans what they were owed.”

The VA’s Loan Guaranty Service (LGY) program identified more than 130,000 loans where a refund was potentially due. While some funding fees charged were found to be attributable to clerical errors, most fees were charged correctly. The exception was for those veterans whose exemption status changed following the issuance of a disability rating after the closing of their loan. Letters were mailed notifying veterans who were eligible for a refund.

The VA has made several program and systems changes to provide veterans and lenders with the most up-to-date information possible on a veteran’s funding fee exemption status. The changes include:

- Enhancements to veteran-focused communications to better inform about the loan funding fee and when it may be waived as part of the loan transaction.
- Policy guidance directing lenders to inquire about a veteran’s VA disability claim status during the loan underwriting process and obtain an updated Certificate of Eligibility no more than three days prior to loan closing if the veteran had a disability claim pending.
- System and procedural changes to ensure regular internal oversight activities swiftly identify veterans eligible for fee waivers and potential refund cases.

Veterans who believe that they are entitled to a refund of the VA funding fee are strongly encouraged to call their VA Regional Loan Center at (877) 827-3702 to find out if they are eligible.

Information about VA home loan funding fees can be found on the [LGY program](#) website.



# VA BOARD OF VETERANS' APPEALS MAKES HISTORY WITH RECORD BREAKING YEAR IN 2019

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) [Board of Veterans' Appeals](#) (Board) surpassed last year's record-high output for decisions.

The Board officially dispatched 95,089 decisions for veterans and their families in fiscal year (FY) 2019, the largest number of decisions in the Board's history – that is 5,000 more decisions than the goal and 11% more than the Board's decision output in FY 2018, the previous record high.

"It was also a historic year for hearings held," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "The Board held a record 22,743 hearings in FY 2019, a 38% increase compared to the number of hearings held in FY 2018."

This was in addition to implementing [Appeals Modernization](#), undergoing a reorganization with addition of new leaders across the organization, taking over all hearing scheduling and testing virtual tele-hearings.

The Board's success is a result of strong collaboration and customer experience across the department – with the Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Chief of Staff leading the way along with VA's administrations, offices and programs areas.





# JFHQ RECEIVES NEW DETACHMENT COMMANDER

The South Dakota Army National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters received a new detachment commander during a ceremony in Rapid City, Oct. 5. Capt. Kristian Ellendorf, of Howard, took command from Maj. Sarah Jensen, of Rapid City, who served in the position since Aug. 2017.

With about 200 members assigned, the main focus for JFHQ is to support the more than 3,100 soldiers of the SDARNG, and provides command and control of essential services in administration, training, logistics, soldier and family services and other functions to support state and federal missions.

"When I reflect on my military ambitions thus far, this is the command opportunity I had been searching for," said Ellendorf. "I want a command where I can be involved in the organization, better understand the functions of the National Guard and the missions of each individual unit and empower our soldiers."

Ellendorf credits her family and friends for her ability to serve in the SDARNG.

Ellendorf began her SDARNG career in April of 2007 when she enlisted in the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade. In May 2010, she received her commission as a medical service officer and was assigned to the 730th Area Support Medical Company.

Ellendorf has held a variety of positions throughout her including 730th platoon leader and executive officer and 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment team leader and executive officer.

On the civilian side, Ellendorf is a partner in Mumford Protsch LLP, in Howard where she is an attorney for the school district, the city attorney and the deputy state's attorney for Miner County.

Ellendorf said she is looking forward to the opportunities and challenges that come with this new assignment.







## Whole Health Basic Training



*Get the most out of your VA health care benefits!*

**Essential learning courses for every enrolled Veteran and every  
transitioning service member**

All courses are free & no appointments are needed for these drop-in classes.  
You may bring a support person.

Contact: Connie Denevan, Whole Health Coordinator, 605-336-3230, extension 7736

**Orientation to Whole Health and VA Resources:** Led by Veteran peers, this class will introduce you to VA's Whole Health approach to care and help you understand all the services provided through the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System. You will learn how your strengths combined with our programs and services can help empower and equip you to live your life to the fullest.

**Beginner Yoga:** This class focuses on breathing techniques, physical postures and movements, guided rest, and focusing the mind.

**Tai Chi:** This class involves a series of slow, meditative body movements to promote balance, strength, inner peace and calm.

\*There are no classes held on Federal holidays

CLASS	DATES*	TIME	PLACE
Orientation to Whole Health and VA Resources	December 11, 2019 March 11, 2020 June 1, 2020 September 9, 2020	1:00 – 3 p.m.	Sioux Falls VA Medical Center, 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor Primary Care Room 2013
Orientation to Whole Health and VA Resources	3 <sup>rd</sup> Saturday monthly	9:00 – 11:00 a.m.	Vet Center 3200 W 49 <sup>th</sup> Street, Sioux Falls, SD 57106
Tai Chi	Mondays weekly Wednesday weekly	3:30 – 4:30 p.m. 3:30 – 4:30 p.m.	Sioux Falls VA Medical Center, Integrative Health, Building 52 Room 107
Chair Yoga	Tuesdays weekly	3:30 – 4:30 p.m.	Sioux Falls VA Medical Center, Integrative Health, Building 52 Room 107
Beginner Yoga	Thursdays weekly	3:30 – 4:30 p.m.	Sioux Falls VA Medical Center, Integrative Health, Building 52 Room 107

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
Sioux Falls VA Health Care System

Choose **VA**  
10/2019

# WOMEN VETERANS

## A DAY FOR YOU



### VA Resource Fair

You are invited to attend  
four different breakout sessions

- “Flower Power”: The Language of Flowers
  - Health Eating
  - Chair Yoga
  - Aroma Therapy

Rochelle Binion, Chief of Chaplain Service will present on Story  
Telling in the Military over lunch.  
Lunch will be provided.

Date: Friday, November 1, 2019  
Time: 9:00 a.m.—3:30 p.m.  
Location: Celebrate Church  
1000 S Sycamore Ave, Sioux Falls, SD 57110

Register by October 16, 2019  
Contact [VHASUXWOMENVETOUTREACH@VA.GOV](mailto:VHASUXWOMENVETOUTREACH@VA.GOV) or call  
Brenda Fredericks at (605) 336-3230 ext 6250



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs





# MILITARY & VETERAN *dinner*

*to honor military / veterans and families that have served our country*

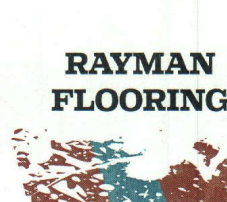
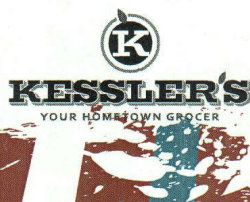
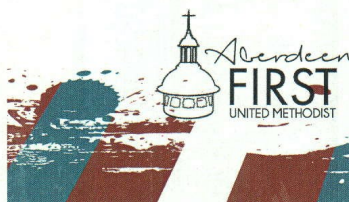
**A FREE EVENT**  
**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2019**  
**12:30PM**

**PLEASE R.S.V.P. BY NOVEMBER 7TH**  
**605.225.5680**

**JOIN US FOR WORSHIP!**  
**9:00AM, 10:15AM, 11:00AM**

**ABERDEEN FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
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**[WWW.ABERDEENFIRST.ORG](http://WWW.ABERDEENFIRST.ORG)**

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# Gallantly Forward 2019 Gala

*Saturday,*  
**OCTOBER 19<sup>th</sup>**

**LACROIX HALL**  
RUSHMORE PLAZA CIVIC CENTER

*Doors AT 5pm*  
*Tickets \$35*

BUY FOR VETERANS IF YOU CAN'T ATTEND!

SGT Derr battled with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following his combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. We honor Colton by helping his fellow veterans.

*The battle does not end  
when the war is over.*

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Oct 10—Take Back the Night—Multicultural Center—Sioux Falls (515 N. Main Avenue) 5:30 pm—7:00 pm (CT)  
 Oct 12—Mission VI Midwest Honor Flight Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—9:00 pm (CT)  
 Oct 14—State Offices Closed  
 Oct 17—Trail Ridge Health and Wellness Fair—12:00—4:00 pm (CT)  
 Oct 18—Expo for Her—Sioux Falls Arena—2:00—9:00 pm (CT)  
 Oct 18—ERLS Wills for Heroes—Sioux Falls VA Medical Center—Room D39 (2501 W. 22nd Street)—9:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)  
 Oct 19—Derr Gala—Rushmore Plaza Civic Center—Lacroix Hall—Rapid City—(518 6th Street—Suite 2) —5:00 pm (MT)  
 Oct 23—SD Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters (209 N. Garfield Avenue)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)  
 Nov 2—Second Annual Hangar Dance (Midwest Honor Flight Benefit)—Mid America Museum of Aviation—Sioux City, IA—7:00 pm (CT)  
 Nov 2—BHSU Hero Appreciation Game—Lyle Hare Stadium—Spearfish—1:00 pm (MT)  
 Nov 5—Veteran Stand Down and Resource Fair—Rapid City Rushmore Plaza Civic Center—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)  
 Nov. 10—Military and Veterans Dinner—Aberdeen First United Methodist Church (502 S. Lincoln Street)—12:30 pm (CST)  
 Nov 11—State Offices Closed  
 Nov 15—ERLS Wills for Heroes—Sioux Falls VA Medical Center—Room D39 (2501 W. 22nd Street)—9:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)  
 Nov 28-29—State Offices Closed  
 Dec 3—Governor Noem's Budget Address  
 Dec 9—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony—Flaming Fountain Veterans Memorial at Capitol Lake in Pierre—11:00 am (CT)  
 Dec—23-25—State Offices Closed

2020

Jan 1—State Offices Closed  
 Jan 14—State of the State Address  
 Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception  
 Feb 21-23—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center—Oacoma  
 Mar 27-29—SD Vietnam and Era Veterans Reunion—Dakota Sioux Casino—Watertown  
 May 15-17—DAV State Convention—Brookings  
 Jun 18-21—American legion State Convention—Huron

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